CHAPTER V

FACTION AND FAITH

121 Prior to the year 1913 only two factional divisions appeared in Badaga history. Each of these was the result of a conflict over religious issues; and each started as a conflict in a single hamlet and grew to Nilgiri-wide proportions. As some of the more recent factional disputes, to be discussed later in this thesis, are also concerned with articles of faith, it will be necessary first of all to introduce the reader to the religious systems of the Badagas. Once these are understood, at least in outline, our discussion of factionalism will become clearer.

Śaivites, Lingayats and Christians

795 Among the Badagas four distinct religious systems are to be found. The great majority of the people (perhaps 90%) fall within the general category of South Indian Śaivites. Three minorities, each numbering several thousand adherents, are 121 the Lingayats, the Protestants and the Roman Catholics. In the present study there will be no need to go into questions of the history, doctrine or ritual of any of these creeds. A short note on the manifest characteristics of each system will suffice.

776 The Badaga Śaivites, including the Lingayats, acknowledge the existence
779 of seven kinds of supernatural being, each of whom receives some kind of ritualized respect.

First and most important is the Hindu god Śiva, who is regarded, by

Badagas and all other Śaivites, as the supreme god. As is common in village Hinduism, he is worshipped in a variety of forms, each of which may appear outwardly to be a distinct deity. The most widely encountered of these in the Nilgiris are the bull, Nandi, and the members of Śiva's family, his wife Pārvati and his sons Ganeśa and Subramaniam. Badagas also worship the disease-bringing goddesses, Mari and her three sisters, all of whom are aspects of Pārvati. There are a few (mostly recent) temples to Viśnu, who is called Rangaṉātaṉ, and who, together with Brahmā, is considered to be an inferior aspect of Śiva. Śiva is commonly represented in the temples of all Badagas, and not only among the Lingayats, by a stone in the lingam shape. This is supposed to symbolize the form of the universe. Each hamlet usually has a temple dedicated to at least one of these gods.

The second category of deities is that of the distinctively Badaga gods, who seem originally — to judge from the stories told about them — to have been the ancestors of the Badagas themselves. There are two important ones: Hiriodeya, an old man, and Hetthe, an old woman usually thought of as his wife (Harkness 1832: 110; Francis 1908: 316). Many hamlets have temples for one or both of them, and seem to regard them in each place as ancestors of the particular hamlet rather than of all Badagas. Unlike the other gods, they are depicted on temples in the distinctive Badaga dress.

The third category covers the gods of nature. These include such phenomena as sun, moon, wind, water and earth. They are not objects of protracted worship. There are no temples to the gods of nature; only certain patterns of respect. Thus, when a man gets up in the morning he salutes the sun as he says a brief prayer relating to his own well-being. When a man has to cross a stream with a horse, he should not insult the water by riding straight through it but should

776 dismount. He should not urinate in a stream, either; nor should he stand up while
• 779 urinating on the earth, for this shows disrespect to the earth goddess. He should
782 always squat down to urinate or defecate, and for fear of disrespect the buttocks
(514) should not be directed toward the sun at this time. But apart from such minor regulations for personal conduct the gods of nature receive little attention, except when the water-goddess has not brought rain in time. Then the villagers will say prayers and make offerings at one of their temples in an attempt to get the favor of a rainfall.

775 The fourth category of supernatural beings is the ghost. This is the wan-
779 dering spirit of a person who chanced to die before he was destined to, and it frequently gets inside a living person to find warmth and food. The malicious
(789) ghosts can cause a lot of trouble, but there is no use in worshipping them. When a ghost becomes bothersome it is exorcised by a man hired for this art, who gives it whatever material requirements it may (through the mouth of the possessed person) demand. Ghosts cannot usually act as intermediaries between men and gods; but there is a special category who become angels. These are dead people who have done good during their lives, but who for some reason want to return to this
(828) world rather than be merged with god. While they are waiting to be reborn to a
(787) higher social status they act as the messengers of god, and come to people in their dreams to warn them of impending disasters.

776 The fifth category of supernatural beings is the demon, who is periodically
779 propitiated with a blood sacrifice or some liquor. This is a being who is incapable
782 of doing good, but may do harm if he chooses. He is thought capable of killing people that he meets at night, and of obstructing various projects. There are no temples to the demon, but there are recognized places in the fields where offerings are left for him, just as there are recognized places for leaving things that

a ghost asks for.

The sixth category of supernatural beings, a group to whom private prayers are often directed in the home, are the great national heroes. These are primarily Mr. Nehru, the late Prime Minister, Subhas Chandra Bose, the Bengali patriot, and above all Mahatma Gandhi. People disagree about the nature of their great power over men; but many Badagas certainly regard them as enlightened saints. Nehru seems to symbolize political power, Bose military power, and Gandhi spiritual power.

Hindu saints are really the seventh category of supernatural beings. Saints, prophets and spiritual leaders, like the national heroes, are worshipped in the home. A small room at one end of the veranda contains framed lithographic prints of such beings, and here the men of the household -- and sometimes the women -- will address their prayers to the depicted pantheon. The collection of framed household deities regularly includes such beings as Śiva and his family, saints like Sai Baba, Swami Vivekananda, Buddha and Jesus Christ (Ranga 1934: 63), political leaders like Nehru, Gandhi, S.C. Bose and K. Kamaraj (then President of the Congress Party), and a portrait of the most recently deceased head of the family. Jesus and Mary are widely respected powers: Badagas who live near to a church sometimes make contributions to the Christians' poor fund at Christmas, and it is not uncommon to see Śaivites present at the Christmas-Eve service in the Protestant church, and at the Easter procession of the Catholic church. One Lingayat man has pictures only of Jesus and the Madonna in his house, and does a daily meditation before them.

Every hamlet feels that to have any prestige in the eyes of others it must at least boast a temple structure for its god or gods. Even so, there are many deities that are embodied only in a rough stone object standing under a tree or

368 778 beside a stream somewhere. Some very small hamlets still have nothing more like a temple than such an object; but usually they will erect at least a small shed over the image. The average-sized hamlet (of perhaps 80-100 households) has four or five built temples, as well as various minor shrines of the kind just described. 368 [621] In addition there is normally a large temple common to the whole "village". Three temples in the Nilgiris (at Melur, Bokkapur and Bergani) attract devotees from all over the District for their annual festivals (Francis 1908: 316-317, 339-340). The 794 [793] larger temples all have Haruva or Gauda priests, and worship is done regularly once a day or once a week. Smaller temples may only be used once or twice a 793 [795] year, and then at a particular festival. While priests are appointed from among the villagers, or may sometimes be hereditary roles in certain families, they officiate only in their own hamlet or "village", and there is no kind of wider church-like organization to Badaga Śaivism. For the past century, however, Badagas have 788 [795] been making pilgrimages to various of the major South Indian temple centers, the closest being Perur, near Coimbatore, Nanjangud, near Mysore, and Palni. There has thus been contact in recent times with the "great tradition" and its philosophical literature; and this has had the effect of bringing Badaga religious practices closer to those of the plainsmen. This topic will be considered later in the thesis (cf. Chapter VII).

779 Lingayatism, otherwise known as Virasaivism, is one of the more important and most recent schools to develop in Śaivite philosophy. The origin of the present Lingayat philosophical system, qua system, can be traced quite reliably to ca. 1160 A.D. at the Central Indian city of Kalyana, where it was formulated by a saint named Basava. After him came many followers and com-

mentators who have left a large body of writings preserved in the monasteries of Mysore State.

The Lingayat philosophy is a complex and neatly coherent system of speculation, but until literacy came to the Badagas during the present century it was known to Lingayat Badagas only in merest outline. Vīraśaivism is most prevalent in the present Mysore State, where the Mysore Backward Classes Committee Final Report (1961) estimated the number of adherents in 1959 at 3,293,000. The few thousand of these people who live in the Nilgiris are the southernmost fringe of this religious community; and until the present century they were practically ignored by the monasteries in Mysore State.

Vīraśaivism is a creed that professes the omnipotence of Śiva: a Lingayat should not worship any other god than Śiva, and must worship him through the medium of the image of the lingam, which hangs in a metal container from the man's neck throughout his adult life. There is a hierarchy of monks living in numerous monasteries throughout Southern India, although not in the Nilgiris; but temples are not a necessary part of Lingayat religion.

For Lingayats there is in their doctrine no caste: a Lingayat considers himself above and beyond a Brahmin in sanctity. Not only that, but people can be and have been converted to the Lingayat faith from any of the varnas, even sometimes from the Untouchables. The dead Lingayat is buried in the ground, and never cremated. Such universal Hindu tenets as the performance of śraddha (commemorative rites for the dead) and the concept of reincarnation are rejected by Vīraśaivism. It is essentially a reformer's philosophy, directed against the sacerdotal and Vedic traditions, and aiming to remove apparent social and religious evils from Hindu India.

Because of the isolation of the Lingayat Badagas, they have only recently begun to learn about the details of Vīraśaiva philosophy. They wear the lingam and bury their dead; but they worship various deities other than Śiva, just as other Badagas do, and have numerous temples with Lingayat priests but — until two decades ago — no monastery at all. Indeed, all seven categories of supernatural beings which we described earlier as influencing the lives of Śaivite Badagas are equally respected in the Lingayat hamlets. It would probably be correct to say that until the end of the last century the various Lingayat sibs differed culturally from the other Badagas only in their worship of a personal lingam and their custom of burying the dead.

Little need be said here about the Badaga Christians, as we must soon review their emergence as a faction. Their numbers (perhaps 2000) are divided fairly evenly between the unified Protestant Church of South India and the Roman Catholic Church. Relations between the members and clergy of these two churches are now very cordial, although this has not always been so. At the time we are presently concerned with, around 1913, there were no Roman Catholic Badagas: all of the Christians were Lutherans (Ippler 1900: passim).

The Badaga Christians live in the four Nilgiri towns and in several Christian hamlets. These hamlets are exogamous, except in the case where a family has migrated from one hamlet to another and may then arrange marriages with Christians in its new place of residence. In recent cases of marriage between a Catholic and a Protestant, the bride will join whichever is her husband's church.

Discipline in a Protestant hamlet rests in the hands of the Pastorate Committee, which is composed mainly of laymen. This is in contrast with the more